DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 480 072 CG 032 645

AUTHOR	Erford, Bradley T.; Moore-Thomas, Cheryl
TITLE	Program Evaluation and Outcome Assessment Documenting the Worth of Educational Programs.
PUB DATE	2003-08-00
NOTE	10p.; In: Measuring Up: Assessment Issues for Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators; see CG 032 608.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accountability; *Educational Assessment; Educational Quality; *Evaluation Methods; *Outcomes of Education; *Program Evaluation

ABSTRACT

National concerns regarding quality education make program evaluation and outcomes assessment more important than ever. Traditionally, however, educators have failed to hold their programs and services accountable, or to provide evidence that selected activities were achieving intended results. The purpose of this chapter is to give educators the basic tools needed to design and conduct individualized, effective outcomes assessment and program evaluation that will aim to document and determine the worth of specific educational programs. (Contains 14 references.) (GCP)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 480 072

Program Evaluation and Outcome Assessment Documenting the Worth of Educational Programs

By
Bradley T. Erford
Cheryl Moore-Thomas

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG032645

Chapter 37
Program Evaluation and Outcomes Assessment
Documenting the Worth of Educational Programs

Bradley T. Erford & Cheryl Moore-Thomas

The impetus for the call for school reform and accountability may be found in the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Finn & Kanstroom, 2001). National concerns regarding quality education make program evaluation and outcomes assessment more important than ever. Traditionally, however, educators have failed to hold their programs and services accountable, or to provide evidence that selected activities were achieving intended results (Lombana, 1985).

Some argue that the educational process is so complex that obtaining a true measure of its services and results is difficult at best. Others note that school staffs are so busy meeting the needs of students that they shift the time that should be spent on evaluation to instruction and programming. Others suggest educational practitioners lack understanding of the methodology and procedures of accountability studies. Whatever the reason, the result is a lack of accountability that threatens the success of students and the future of some educational institutions. Each reason contributes to avoidance of professional and ethical obligations to ensure that educational programs are of high quality and are effective in meeting students' needs. Without accountability, education service providers and the greater education community may be regarded as suspect.

Stone and Bradley (1994) suggest six purposes of evaluation: (a) to measure the effectiveness of a total program and its activities; (b) to collect data that will help determine what program modifications are needed; (c) to determine the level of program acceptance by and support from stakeholders; (d) to obtain information that can be used to inform the public; (e) to collect data that add to staff evaluation; and (f) to analyze the program budget and compare expenditures to future program needs. In general, then, program evaluation and outcomes assessment work to document and determine the worth of the entire school program.

The purpose of this chapter is to give educators the basic tools needed to design and conduct individualized, effective outcomes assessment and program evaluation that will aim to document and determine the worth of specific educational programs.

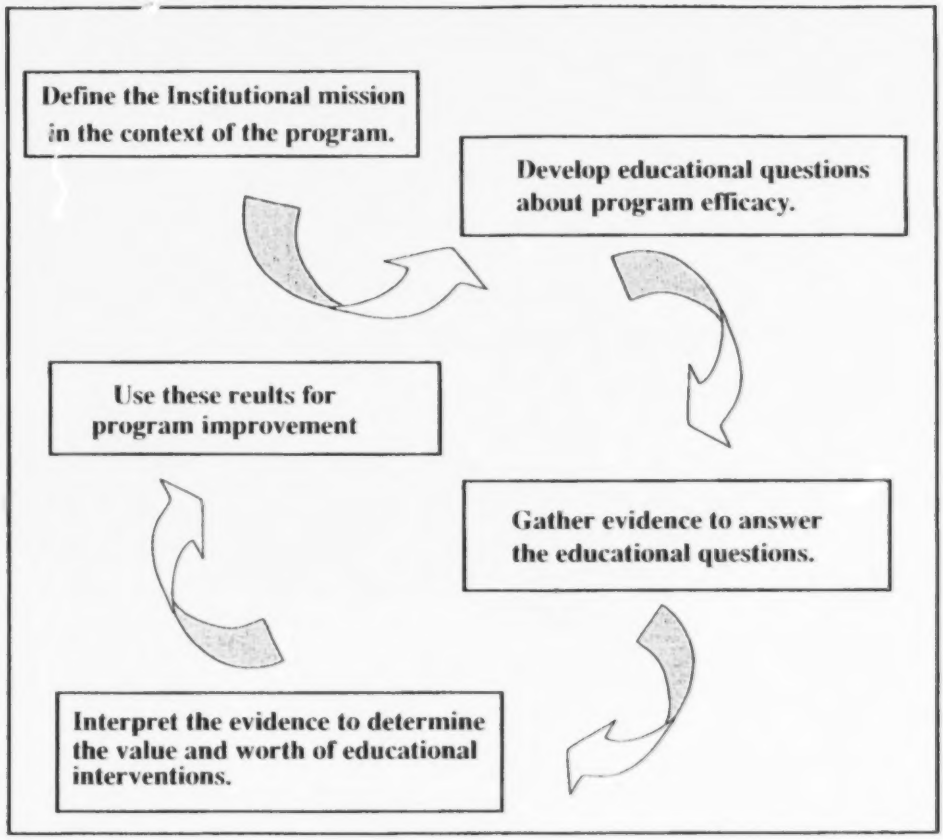
The Assessment Loop

The evaluation of a comprehensive educational program is at least two tiered. Gysbers and Henderson (2000) describe two key elements: program evaluation (process), and results (outcomes) evaluation. "Program evaluation is the process of systematically determining the quality of a school program and how the program can be improved" (Sanders, 1992, p. 3). Program evaluation can also be thought of as a process analogous to the measurement concept of content validity (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). *Content validity* is determined by a systematic examination of a test's, or in this case program's, content. In the context of educational program evaluation, an important guiding question emerges: Does the school have a written, comprehensive program that is fully implemented and aligned with district, state, or national standards? *Outcomes evaluation,* on the other hand, attempts to answer the following question: Does the educational program in fact produce the intended outcomes (Terenzini, 1989)?

Practical guidelines are essential to conducting effective program evaluations and outcomes assessment (Atkinson, Furlong, & Janoff, 1979; Fairchild, 1986; Krumboltz, 1974). It is most practical to connect program concerns to only one or two clearly articulated and defined questions. This practice may help to ensure focused and manageable assessment.

There is much confusion regarding what program evaluation and outcomes assessment are and are not. Undoubtedly, the assessment process is systematic, ongoing, and cyclical. The program evaluation and outcomes assessment processes start small and build upon what is found to work. Successful methods and goals of individual programs are determined and replicated so that over time necessary program refinements work to build a comprehensive educational program that impressively meets an institution's mission. The assessment loop presented in Figure 1 provides a way to visually conceptualize program evaluation and the ways in which outcome studies can be used to improve educational programs.

Figure 1. Program Evaluation Cycle


Define the Institutional mission in the context of the program.
Develop educational questions about program efficacy.
Use these reults for program improvement
Gather evidence to answer the educational questions.
Interpret the evidence to determine the value and worth of educational interventions.

Many educators view assessment as a discrete component of education; however, assessment is actually an integrated part of a continual process for program improvement. Assessment procedures begin with an institution's mission. The mission ideally permeates every aspect of the educational institution. A school's mission should be evident in its structure, decision-making processes, interpersonal interactions, programmatic regularities, and behavioral regularities. The institutional mission provides the basis from which meaningful, institution-specific assessment questions will arise. These assessment questions lead to the determination of what evidence must be collected. Evidence can provide crucial information about program evaluation and program results (i.e., outcomes).

Evidence is typically derived from standardized or informal measures, student performances, or student products. Once a school has gathered evidence, it must interpret the data, then draw conclusions regarding the educational program's worth, strengths, weaknesses, and outcomes. A school should use these interpretations and conclusions to change the entire program or to improve parts of the program.

As assessment information is used to prompt programmatic changes, goal setting and the posing of new questions begins again. The loop in Figure 1 should never stop. It represents a continuous process in which assessment results are interpreted and fed back into the improvement process. Unless assessment involves all components of the assessment loop, program evaluation efforts may prove futile or incomplete. With this understanding of program evaluation and outcomes assessment in mind, a school can consider specific definitions and processes.

Assessment Terms and Processes

A number of terms associated with outcomes assessment and program evaluation are important to understand. *Evaluation* is the measurement of worth and indicates that a judgment will be made regarding the effectiveness of a program (Cronbach, 1983). Specificity is key to evaluation. Clearly stating what is to be measured and how it is to be measured is fundamental to meaningful, effective assessment.

Evidence is qualitative or quantitative data that help make judgments or decisions. Evidence can be gleaned from a number of sources, including portfolios, performances, external judges or examiners, observations, local tests, purchased tests, student self-assessments, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and student work. Some of this evidence may already be routinely collected by a school or district and may thus provide a readily accessible source of data about program effectiveness. Which evidence source to use, however, is determined by the specific question to be answered. Evidence selection should be made carefully. If measures are used, they must be reliable and valid. Sometimes ineffective program outcomes stem exclusively from poor or inappropriate measurement choices rather than program deficits.

Formative evaluation is evaluative feedback that occurs during the implementation of a program. *Summative evaluation* is feedback collected at a specified endpoint in an evaluation process (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Formative evaluation allows for midcourse corrective action. Although summative evaluation is more widely used, formative evaluation is an advantageous endeavor when the time, dollar, and human cost of educational programming is considered.

A *stakeholder* is anyone involved or interested in, or potentially benefiting from, a program (Sanders, 1992; Worthen et al., 1997). Students, parents, teachers, school counselors, administrators,

community leaders, college faculty, and local employers, among others, are potential educational stakeholders. Inclusion of a variety of relevant stakeholders is important to the assessment process.

Reporting Assessment Results

Reporting assessment findings is also important to effective program evaluation and outcomes assessment. The school leadership team—including administrators, teachers, professional school counselors, staff members, parents, and other appropriate stakeholders—should write and be involved in every step of the reporting process. Although a comprehensive report may be helpful for analysis purposes, a one- to two-page executive summary should also be prepared for release to system administrators and the general school community. As general guidelines for report writing, Heppner, Kivlighan and Wampold (1992) suggest, "(1) be informative, (2) be forthright, (3) do not overstate or exaggerate, (4) be logical and organized, (5) have some style, (6) write and rewrite, and (7) when all else fails, just write!" (p. 376). Although they may have intended the last guideline to be humorous, it is important to note that results must be documented, interpreted, and reported for accountability to occur.

Case Study

The following case integrates, in a practical way, the key concepts of outcome assessment and program evaluation presented in this chapter. Beall Middle School is in a suburban middle-class community. Over the past 10 years, the student population of Beall has changed to match the changing demographics of the surrounding community. Beall's current 600-student enrollment is 31 percent minority. Beall enjoys a 98 percent daily attendance rate. Three percent of the students receive free or reduced-cost lunch.

The slogan of Beall Middle School is "Success for Every Student." The staff has embraced the middle school philosophy to deliver a comprehensive, stable program that provides educational opportunity for all students. The leadership team at Beall has been closely monitoring test results. Over the past four years Beall's standardized test scores have fallen significantly. In light of this finding, the leadership team posed several educational questions, including Is the current instructional program enabling all students to meet the school's mission of success? From the initial question, the school counselor posed a

related discipline-specific question aligned with the school's mission, the district guidelines, and the *National Standards for School Counseling Programs*. The counselor asked, Are all students acquiring "the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the life span?" (Campbell & Dahir, 1997, p. 20). The school leadership team felt that the discipline-specific question was on target and focused enough to guide meaningful assessment and evaluation.

Having identified their educational question, the counseling department and leadership team determined that surveys would provide an appropriate source of evidence to answer the school's question. The department then developed student, staff, and parent surveys based on the school district's guidance and counseling curriculum and the competencies of the academic development standard of the

National Standards for School Counseling Programs (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). To help ensure validity, central office guidance and counseling staff, a college school counseling faculty partner, and parent and student focus groups reviewed the surveys. Distributed, completed, and tallied over the next two months, the surveys yielded important data.

The results seemed to suggest that significant percentages of the students and parents wanted more help with time-management skills. The teacher surveys seemed to suggest that students needed more help identifying attitudes and behaviors that lead to successful learning. The counseling department and leadership team wrote a brief, user-friendly report of the data to be shared at leadership, staff, and PTA meetings. Using these data, the counseling department, in collaboration with the instructional team leaders and chairs of the academic departments, redesigned the second semester comprehensive guidance and counseling plan to include emphasis on these areas. A key component of the redesigned plan called for formative evaluation and midcourse correction that would be jointly monitored by the school counselors, administrators, and representatives of the leadership team. Evidence to be examined for formative evaluation included students' third quarter work-study skill grades, educational management team notes and strategies developed and implemented during the third quarter, and a student assessment built into the third quarter schoolwide guidance lessons on time management. All stakeholders were confident that this assessment loop, with its inherent level of accountability, would more effectively monitor and guide Beall Middle School to its intended goal of success for every student.

Summary

The Beall Middle School case suggests that program evaluation and outcomes assessment are important tools for effective service delivery in every area of a school program. As calls for increased accountability in education rise, educators, school counselors, other school staff members, and other educational stakeholders will be well advised to implement ongoing, cyclical program evaluation and outcomes assessment processes.

References

Angelo, T., & Cross, K. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Atkinson, D. R., Furlong, M., & Janoff, D. S. (1979). A four-component model for proactive accountability in school counseling. *School Counselor, 26,* 222–228.

Campbell, C., & Dahir, C. (1997). *The national standards for school counseling programs.* Alexandria, VA: American School Counselor Association.

Cronbach, L. J. (1983). Course improvement through evaluation. In C. F. Madaus, M. Scriven, & D. L. Stufflebeam (Eds.), *Evaluation models* (pp. 101–116). Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff.

Fairchild, T. N. (1986). Time analysis: Accountability tool for school counselors. *School Counselor, 34,* 36–43.

Finn, C., & Kanstroom, M. (2001). State academic standards. *Brookings Papers on Education Policy, 2001*(1), 131–179.

Gysbers, N. C., & Henderson, P. (2000). Developing and managing your school counseling program (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Heppner, P. P., Kivlighan, D. M., Jr., & Wampold, B. E. (1992). *Research design in counseling.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks-Cole.

Krumboltz, J. D. (1974). An accountability model for counselors. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 52,* 639–646.

Lombana, J. H. (1985). Guidance accountability: A new look at an old problem. *School Counselor, 32,* 340–346.

Sanders, J. (1992). *Evaluating school programs: An educator's guide.* Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press, Inc. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 423166)

Stone, L. A., & Bradley, F. O. (1994). *Foundations of elementary and middle school counseling.* White Plains, NY: Longman.

Terenzini, P. (1989). Assessment with open eyes. *Journal of Higher Education, 60*(6), 644–664.

Worthen, B. B., Sanders, J. R., & Fitzpatrick, J. L. (1997). *Program evaluation: Alternative approaches and practical guidelines* (2nd ed.). New York: Longman.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

[ ] This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

[X] This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").